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SPYING AND A FREE SOCIETY—
CIA CHIEF SPEAKS OUT

A rare glimpse inside this nation's most secret agency. That's what the CIA Director provides in this defense of his organization against recurrent attacks. He tells what the CIA does—and reassures Americans as to what it does not do.

Following are excerpts from an address by Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence, to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington, D. C., April 14, 1971:

I welcome this opportunity to speak to you today about the place of an intelligence service in a democratic government. In doing so, I recognize that there is a paradox which I hope can be dispelled:

On the one hand, I can assure you that the quality of foreign intelligence available to the United States Government in 1971 is better than it has ever been before.

On the other hand, at a time when it seems to me to be self-evident that our Government must be kept fully informed on foreign developments, there is a persistent and growing body of criticism which questions the need and the propriety for a democratic society to have a Central Intelligence Agency.

I am not referring to the occasional criticism of CIA's performance—the question of whether we gave advance warning of this coup or that revolt, or how accurately we forecast the outcome of an election or a military operation. By necessity, intelligence organizations do not publish the extent of their knowledge, and we neither confirm nor deny challenges of this nature. We answer to those we serve in the Government.

What I am referring to are the assertions that the Central Intelligence Agency is an "invisible government"—a law unto itself—engaged in provocative, covert activities repugnant to a democratic society and subject to no controls.

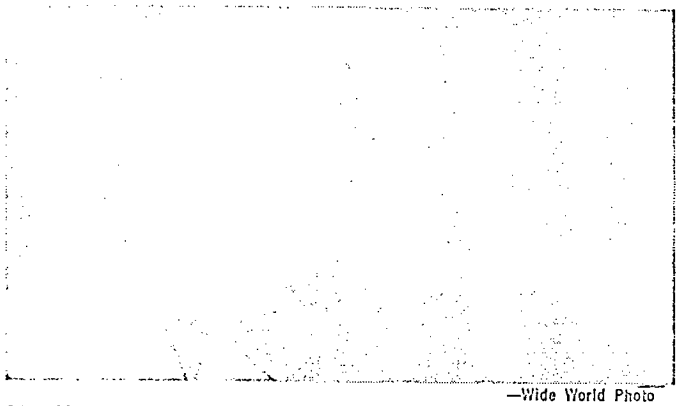
This is an outgrowth, I suppose, of an inherent American distaste for the peacetime gathering of intelligence. Our mission, in the eyes of many thoughtful Americans, may appear to be in conflict with some of the traditions and ideals of our free society. It is difficult for me to agree with this view, but I respect it. It is quite another matter when some of our critics—taking advantage of the traditional silence of those engaged in intelligence—say things that are either vicious or just plain silly.

There is the charge, for example, that the Central Intelligence Agency is somehow involved in the world drug traffic. We are not. As fathers, we are concerned about the lives of our children and grandchildren, as are all of you. As an agency, in fact, we are heavily engaged in tracing the foreign roots of the drug traffic for the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, and this arrant nonsense helps not at all.

As a general rule we are silent, because we must maintain the security of our intelligence operations, but we also recognize that the people of the United States have a legitimate interest in every arm of their Government. There is, fortunately, enough fact in the open record, and in the pertinent legislation, to meet that public interest.

I propose, therefore, to discuss with you the legislative charter of the CIA, the unique functions of a central intelligence organization, and finally—in order to reconcile our security requirements with the democratic society we serve—the role of intelligence in policy formulation, and the controls, checks and balances under which we operate. . . .

Our charter, the National Security Act of 1947, provides that in the interest of national security the Central Intelligence Agency will advise the National Security Council on intelligence activities of the Government, make recommendations to the National Security Council for the co-ordination of such activities, correlate and evaluate foreign intelligence, perform additional services of common concern



—Wide World Photo

Mr. Helms to editors: "Statute forbids the CIA to have any police powers. . . . We do not target on American citizens."

and such other functions and duties relating to intelligence as the National Security Council may direct.

This latter language was designed to enable us to conduct such foreign activities as the National Government may find it convenient to assign to a "secret service." These activities have always been secondary to the production of intelligence, and under direct control by the executive branch. Obviously, I cannot go into any detail with you on such matters, and I do not intend to.

And may I emphasize at this point that the statute specifically forbids the Central Intelligence Agency to have any police, subpoena or law-enforcement powers, or any domestic-security functions. I can assure you that except for the normal responsibilities for protecting the physical security of our own personnel, our facilities and our classified information, we do not have any such powers and functions; we have never sought any; we do not exercise any. In short, we do not target on American citizens.

In matters directly affecting the security of the United States, the President and his National Security Council want

underground submarine pens at Matanzas. Our analysts had the facts to disprove this, given the geological structure of the shoreline and the crucial inshore depths in the bay.

Another report alleged that light bombers were being stored in a particular cave. We have a comprehensive speleological survey of Cuba, which showed that this particular cave curved sharply a few yards inside its entrance—too sharply to admit a vehicle, let alone an aircraft. We also had the photography to show that there had been no work to alter the shape of that cave.

A merchant seaman gave us a detailed description of what he thought might be a rounded concrete dome covering missiles—complete with range and bearing from the pier where his ship had docked. A map of Havana and a recent city directory established that it was a relatively new movie theater.

The watch for missiles, however, was complicated by the fact that there were defensive surface-to-air missiles in Cuba, and to the untrained observer one missile looks pretty much like another.

In fact, some of these "missile" reports we checked turned out to be torpedoes, fuel tanks and even industrial pipe and mooring buoys.

Our intelligence files in Washington, however—thanks to U-2 photography of the Soviet Union and to a number of well-placed and courageous Russians who helped us—included a wealth of information on Soviet missile systems. We had descriptions or photographs of the missiles, their transporters and other associated equipment, and characteristic sites in the Soviet Union. We knew what to look for.

Guided by this background, the interrogators were able to sort out from the flood of reports the ones which established the arrival of MRBM and IRBM [medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic missile] equipment in Cuba. We were then able to locate the sites under construction by reconnaissance and tell President Kennedy the exact scope of the threat.

There remained the question—for the policy makers—of what to do. This required a determination, among other essentials, of whether the Soviets would be able to strike at the United States with their weapons in Cuba in the event of a U. S. ultimatum.

Again, thanks to all our collection sources and to the central analytical process, we were able to inform the President precisely how long it would take to make the missile sites in Cuba operational. The rest of the Cuban missile crisis is history.

On Tap: a Vast Army of Experts

The intelligence analysts who participate in reaching these conclusions, of course, run the gamut from some who have just begun an intelligence career to others who have devoted a lifetime of study to their speciality. To strike a more typical mean, one of the experts who enabled us to give President Johnson a correct appreciation of the Middle Eastern situation in May, 1967—just before the start of the June war—held a doctorate in Near Eastern studies, had lived for several years in Arab villages and at the time had spent 12 years with CIA. . . .

About half of our substantive analysts have graduate degrees. Almost 1 in 3 has his doctorate. We have capabilities in 113 foreign languages and dialects. We can call on the expertise of anthropologists, chemists, metallurgists, medical doctors, psychiatrists, botanists, geologists, engineers of every variety, statisticians, mathematicians, archaeologists and foresters. Our people have academic degrees in 298 major fields of specialization from accounting to zoology. . . .

Ironically, our efforts to obtain foreign intelligence in this country have generated some of the more virulent criticism of the Central Intelligence Agency. It is a fact that we have, as I said, no domestic security role, but if there is a chance that a private American citizen traveling abroad has acquired foreign information that can be useful to the American policy maker, we are certainly going to try to interview him. If there is a competent young graduate student who is interested in working for the United States Government, we may well try to hire him.

The trouble is that to those who insist on seeing us as a pernicious and pervasive secret government, our words "interview" and "hire" translate into "suborn," "subvert" and "seduce"—or something worse.

We use no compulsion. If a possible source of information does not want to talk to us, we go away quietly. If some student groups object to our recruiting on campus, we fall back to the nearest federal office building. Similarly, we welcome the opportunity to place research contracts with the universities, but, again, these are strictly voluntary.

When an Agency "Wraps Itself in Secrecy"—

And so I come to the fundamental question of reconciling the security needs of an intelligence service with the basic principles of our democratic society. At the root of the problem is secrecy, because it is axiomatic that an intelligence service—whatever type of government it serves—must wrap itself in as much secrecy as possible in order to operate effectively. . . .

We have made it our practice not to answer criticism. Former Senator Saltonstall summed it up pretty well when he said that in an open society like ours it is impossible to inform the public without informing our enemies.

I cannot, then, give you an easy answer to the objections raised by those who consider intelligence work incompatible with democratic principles. The nation must, to a degree, take it on faith that we, too, are honorable men devoted to her service. I can assure you that we are, but I am precluded from demonstrating it to the public.

I can assure you that what I have asked you to take on faith the elected officials of the United States Government watch over extensively, intensively and continuously.

Starting with the executive branch, the Central Intelligence Agency operates under the constant supervision and direction of the National Security Council. No significant foreign program of any kind is undertaken without the prior approval of an NSC subcommittee which includes representatives of the President, the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense.

In addition, we report periodically and in detail on the whole range of foreign-intelligence activities to the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, a group of men who have distinguished themselves in government, industry, education and the professions. This board, originally created in 1956 under the chairmanship of Dr. James Killian of M.I.T., has been headed by Gen. John E. Hull, Mr. Clark Clifford, Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, and currently by retired Adm. George W. Anderson.

Our budget is gone over line for line by the Office of Management and Budget—and by the appropriate committees of the Congress as well. . . .

In short, the Central Intelligence Agency is not and cannot be its own master. It is the servant of the United States Government, undertaking what that Government asks it to do, under the directives and controls the Government has established. We make no foreign policy. [END]